

POLITICAL HISTORY OF NUPE KINGDOM

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country.¹ But villages and tribal sections were frequently involved in the wars of the kingdom, either themselves causing wars by rebelling against the central government, or being forced to take sides in the wars which the kingdom waged against other groups. Thus the Beni and Gbedegi sided with Bida against the rebellious Kusopa, and again in the Kyedye war, while other tribal sections, such as the riverain Bataci, Kupa, and Ebagi, came to the aid of the Kyedye. In the later times of the kingdom, to which my records chiefly refer, the wars were indeed largely caused by internal disturbances and were directed against rebellious provinces or feudal lords—being reconquests rather than conquests. Historical records mention ten major wars in the thirty years that preceded the British conquest, between 1864 and 1895. Most of these wars are still vividly remembered, and old men would even recall characteristic incidents in the various campaigns. My informants, not unnaturally, greatly extolled the soldierly virtues of the Nupe people. But there is also Barth's testimony that the Nupe army, especially the cavalry, was well known in the Hausa states.² Twice, in fact, (in 1880) the Nupe were called to Hausa to help their allies, the Emirs of Kontagora and Gwandu, to put down rebellions in their countries.

The Nupe army was comparatively loosely organized. It possessed only a small nucleus of regular troops, represented in the king's bodyguard; the rest of the army consisted of levies of slaves, volunteers, and mercenary soldiers, raised by the houses of the feudal nobility. But these household troops, too, were largely composed of trained and experienced soldiers.

The king's bodyguard comprised both infantry and cavalry. The foot-soldiers, called *dogari nya dakari* (i.e. 'guards on foot'), were equipped with guns or bows and arrows, and were under the command of the *Etsu Dogari*. The troops who carried guns were mostly slaves, the sons of slaves from the king's household, the others were free men, mercenary soldiers—among them many foreigners, from Hausa, Bornu, and Yoruba—who had taken service under the *Etsu Nupe*. Under *Etsu Maliki* this royal bodyguard numbered 80 men. The royal horse troops, a slightly larger group, were called *lefidi*, after the cotton-wool armour which they wore. Their weapons were swords, spears, and big leather shields. They were commanded by the *Etsu Lefidi* (who was also called *Zarmi*). One of my informants for the present description was the *Etsu Lefidi* of the royal house of Usman Zaki. He was of Hausa origin, a freed slave and the son of an *Etsu Lefidi* who had served under Usman Zaki himself. The horse troops were composed again of slaves and mercenary soldiers. The slaves who served in the royal cavalry were the sons of titled slaves, every court slave of rank having to send one of his sons into the *Etsu's* bodyguard, and the volunteers were all foreigners. In the reign of *Etsu Maliki* the *lefidi* numbered 100 men.

The troops which were contributed by the various houses of the

¹ The only exception was the warlike Kyedye sub-tribe.

² Barth, op. cit. iv, p. 545. Lander reports that Mallam Dendo could 'command 1,000 horsemen, well equipped, and an uncountable number of foot-soldiers' (op. cit. ii, p. 296).

467 the villages drumming is mainly a side-line to farming. Drummers in Bida form
533 small bands or companies, the origins of which, and the type of their performance,
535 vary. Both men and women perform and women sing. Members of a single group
may come from different families. There are no *efako* arrangements. Such a band
may be in a *bara* (client) relationship to a nobleman. The various bands or com-
panies do not co-operate. The drums are made by wood-workers on the river.²⁰

464 Western crafts are practised for wages in the workshops of the N.A. Public
Works Dept. These craftsmen include blacksmiths, mechanics, carpenters, and
bricklayers. Temporary unskilled labour is employed mainly in occasional work
demanding a large body of unskilled labour, such as construction work of various
kinds. Most of these labourers go home and return to their permanent work at the
end of their temporary employment. Those who are farmers seek temporary
employment during the dry season only, to supplement the normal source of
income.²¹

Women's crafts

323 Pottery is practised individually. Jebba Island, Baro, Badeggi, and Bida are
462 famous for their pottery and there is a regular trade in both potters' clay and pots.

The main products are small water jugs and large water containers. Clay is pre-
pared from swamps at Gbako River, at Badeggi, and sold by the villagers. It is
tempered with powdered potsherd or brick. The building of the pots is individual
work, but firing is undertaken collectively. Pots are simply fired, then given a brown
wash or blackened with a concoction of shea-nut bark.

462 Shea-butter manufacture is carried out by women, but the roasting ovens are
525 built by men.

336 Indigo-dyeing is practised only by a few *Konú* groups, where the men are
weavers and the women dyers. The indigo-grass and the indigo-tree are cultivated
by men, but where the indigo is picked and prepared from wild growing grass, the
work is done by women. The dye-pot platforms are made by women; the dyeing
is carried out individually. There are a few groups of male dyers (e.g., in Mokwa),
who use a rather different technique from that employed by the women.

286 Women's weaving is done on upright looms 21 ins. broad, which may be of
Yoruba origin. Among the Basa-Nge, older women weave patterned raffia.
Fishing-nets in Kede are made by old men and women from *rama* fibre.²²

411 Weapons and tools include spears, bows and poisoned arrows used by the more
remote groups, and knives with blades 8 to 10 ins. long. A few men use flint-locks,
and formerly a whole section of the Nupe army was equipped with guns.

501 Dug-out canoes are used by the Bataci as well as the Kyedye. Those of the
latter are large and square with caulked top strakes. They are mostly obtained
from Onitsha and the lower Benue.

534 Musical instruments include a central-hole flute (the blow-hole is midway
643 between the ends of the tube), pipes, clarinets (of Hausa origin), various drums and
rattles, long bronze trumpets (forming part of the royal insignia), and, in some
areas, bull-roarers and animal horns.

532 Gabi figures are statues of different origins. Two bronze figures stand unpro-
776 tected in the centre of the village of Jebba Island near a dilapidated hut which is
said to have been formerly a temple. There are seven figures at Tada village which
are kept in a round hut and carefully tended; some of these are human figures and
some animal and they appear to be of diverse origins, but are regarded traditionally
as having been left by Tsoede on his flight up the Niger.²³

²⁰ Nadel, op cit., pp. 301-3. For an outline of the *basa* system see below. p. 35.

²¹ Nadel, op cit., pp. 304-8.

²² Nadel, op cit., pp. 235, 293-7; Hopkins, 1934; Notes on Kede District, 1950.

²³ Temple, 1919, pp. 114, 117, 196, 333; Meek, 1925, vol. I. p. 108; Walker, 1934; see also Palmer, 1931.

4: Temple G-4 (no date) 1922

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77/offerings of goats and fowls. The "Ndakogboiya" is, however, 626 losing its efficacy, and indeed Muhammadanism is rapidly replacing the ancient faith.

197 The influence of the Nupe is great, as may be seen from the 634 following lists of septs who speak the Nupe language, or a dialect thereof, and are probably of Nupe origin. These dialects are intelligible to all Nupe. The first three mentioned were by far the largest and most important.

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| 1. Pateji. | 8. Bini. | 14. Kusopa. |
| 2. Kupa. | 9. Dibo.‡ | 15. Zumbufu. |
| 3. Baedeji.* | 10. Duchu. | 16. Kutegi.§ |
| 4. Kede. | 11. Ebe. | 17. Enegi.§ |
| 5. Bangawa.† | 12. Etsu.§ | 18. Gbachi.§ |
| 6. Bata. | 13. Kakanda.† | 19. Ganagana.‡ |
| 7. Batachi. | | |

634 The Nupe of Pateji are situated in Ilorin Province. They are the descendants of the original Nupe Sarakuna, who are now scattered all over the country and are called "Agabi," the [304] name for their distinctive mark of one broad scar on each side of the nose (on the cheek). The custom of cicatrization has become optional.

The Nupe of Kupa inhabit the Agbaja District of Kabba [304] Province; there are also a few in the Bunu District. Their distinctive mark is two lines on each side of the face, from the temple to the lip; within these are a series of small cuts. Their population number some 3,600. Their name is said to be a contraction of "Oku-pari" (=canoe-men of Oku), a river in [41] Kontagora Province. Their weapons are flint locks and spears, arrows only being used in small numbers.

The Kede are a riverain section who have spread along the river banks in the Niger and Ilorin Provinces. The word "Kede" signifies "Dan Sarki," and is connected with a tradition that dates back to the sixteenth century, circ. 1505 A.D., when Edigi, who was travelling up the river, received assistance with his canoe from a man whom he found seated upon a stone fishing, gowned in two robes, one black, the other white. Edigi, when he had established himself as King, conferred upon this man the title of Kuta (which means the man who wears gowns of black and white). One of the Kuta's salutations is "takun"

* The Baedeji are of Yoruba extraction, though, having settled in Nupe territory at Jebba, they have adopted the Nupe language.

† Their Nupe origin is disputed.

‡ The Dibo, Ganagana and Kakanda are sometimes claimed as Nupe, but their languages are different, and it is unlikely that their connection is closer than that induced by neighbourhood.

§ Naturalised Nupe.